

GLASSHOUSE PORT MACQUARIE REGIONAL GALLERY

IZABELA PLUTA REVERSAL

18 MAY — 21 JULY 2019



INTRODUCTION

It is with great pleasure that the Glasshouse Regional Gallery presents *Reversal* by Sydney based artist Izabela Pluta. This exhibition continues the Glasshouse Regional Gallery's commitment to supporting contemporary Australian artists.

Izabela joined us in 2018 as part of our artist-in-residence program to develop this exhibition. The gallery's artist-in-residence program is an opportunity for invited artists to focus on work that either further develops current concerns or fosters the creation of new work based on local experiences. Izabela has combined these two approaches to form a photographically-based installation.

Whilst in residence, Izabela spent time exploring some of Port Macquarie's local history and sites, including the Innes Ruins. Situated on the Lake Innes Nature Reserve, the colonial estate was built by convicts and free labour for Major Archibald Clunes Innes and dates back to the 1830s. Although these particular ruins are not featured in Izabela's work, their complex nature could be alluded to in her installation. Izabela also explored the Bellangry State Forest – the gateway to the mountains of the Hastings area – and has transformed this striking landscape into a large-scale fabric work.

I would like to sincerely thank Izabela Pluta for sharing this expansive new work – an installation unlike any other presented at The Glasshouse before. It has been a pleasure to work with Izabela to develop this exhibition.

Bridget Purtill

Gallery Curator
Glasshouse Regional Gallery



After the pleasure of ruins

'Ruin must be a fantasy, veiled by the mind's dark imaginings.'
Rose Macaulay

Izabela Pluta's series *After the pleasure of ruins* reworks a compendium of 153 photographic images taken during the 1960s by wanderer and photographer Roloff Beny and later used to illustrate the book *Pleasure of Ruins* by the poet and mystic Rose Macaulay. Macaulay's text, originally published in 1953, is a combination of densely evocative prose, history and romantic travelogue that interrogates ruins as artefacts of sublime experience. It guides the reader through a picturesque contemplation of nostalgic decay, crumbling monuments and haunting historical remains.

In the book Macaulay's ornamental writing style is paired with Beny's poignant, if lifelessly reproduced, black and white photographs of extraordinary sites around the globe. The images encyclopaedically represent millennia of diverse civilisations and cultures, including Petra (Jordan); Angkor Wat (Cambodia); Machu Picchu (Peru); Leptis Magna (Libya), Chichen Itza (Mexico); Persepolis (Iran); Tintern Abbey (Wales); and Baalbek (Lebanon). Beny travelled to each of the locations to explore and capture the scenes so expressively rendered in Macaulay's intricate text. He self-published the illustrated version of the book in 1977, almost twenty years after Macaulay's death.

Izabela Pluta chanced upon the *Pleasure of Ruins* in a second-hand bookshop in Sydney, while researching the history of mock ruins and confected 'eye catcher' garden features for her PhD. She found the publication curiously eccentric, neither a 'factual account, rigorously academic nor a work of fiction', and

was fascinated to see that the accompanying images were added posthumously. At once intrigued and perplexed, she noted Macaulay and Beny's evident ardour for the ruinous and their shared pleasure in aesthetics of memory and loss, and in the fading forms and relics of exotic cultures and fallen empires.

Continuing her interest in processes of translation, mutation and fragmentation in photography, Pluta re-imagined Beny's project for *After the pleasure of ruins*. The series comprises a single row of photographic plates that collectively span 30 metres around the gallery walls, each plate coated with opaque bronze pigment applied using a photo—silkscreen transfer process. Every image from the book is covered with the metallic trace of another. The first image in the publication is printed over the last, with the artist repeating this procedure of pairing and layering images from opposite ends of the manuscript, one over the other, while moving sequentially inwards, disrupting the beginning and the end and crafting new imageries and narratives. Through this process Pluta produces positive and negative visual fields, that move in and out of legibility—simultaneously investigating and deconstructing the source imagery, the medium of photography, our faculties of perception and the notion of storytelling itself.

The alluring surfaces and fields shimmer with a longing and gilded desire that pointedly disrupt the fixed images beneath them and suggest an exotic decorative overlay, or a type of cultural blindness or loss of vision. Through this simple gesture Pluta creates highly allusive, subtle and complex political spaces that hint at the way in which images are used to construct, affirm, transform and sometimes limit or obscure our sense of the world and its ever changing complexity. Her gesture is one of claiming, reworking and transforming Beny's imagery in a suggestively ruinous act of ornate violence.

When the artist first viewed Beny's photographs, she was struck by how often these highly recognisable and unique sites reminded her of yet other places. They were identifiable locations that at the same time could be anywhere. Deep in shadow, narrow in tonal range and closely cropped, Beny's images operate in dynamic layers and composites that variously cohere and dissolve into pattern, shifting into studies in composition and form.

In contrast to this fluid time and space continuum, Pluta's pages, or 'book work' as she refers to it, is presented in the gallery with what the artist conceives as a horizontal datum line—a reference to a baseline measurement or point of reference. In this instance this line is demarcated by a painted section across the wall that matches the tone of the gallery floor. Through this defining coordinate Pluta aims to anchor the work to the ground and 're-orient the various subjects back to 'site'.

To accompany *After the pleasure of ruins* Pluta has produced an installation consisting of a draped printed fabric that alludes to the dense and tangled thicket morphology of the invasive lantana. Titled *Reversal*, the fabric is printed with a photograph that was taken in the Bellangry State Forest on the land of the Biripi people during a residency at the Glasshouse Regional Gallery in 2018. Colonising a gallery wall, the introduced species seems to be enveloping the architecture, suggesting a complex unsettled interplay between nature and culture, history, time and place.

Melissa Keys

Curator of Buxton Contemporary, the University of Melbourne, 2019

Endnotes

1 Izabela Pluta in in correspondence with the author, 7 March 2019

2 *ibid.*



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LIST OF WORKS

After the pleasure of ruins 2015/2019

153 unique photo silk screen prints on found book pages
18.7 x 25.4 cm each

Reversal 2019

dye-sublimation print on fabric

550 x 800 cm

Izabela Pluta is represented by THIS IS NO FANTASY
dianne tanzer + nicola stein, Melbourne

BIOGRAPHY

Born Warsaw, Poland 1979, lives and works in Sydney.

Izabela Pluta has exhibited widely in Australia at The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Artspace, The Australian Centre for Photography and UTS Gallery, Sydney; Queensland Centre for Photography, Brisbane; 24 HR Art, Darwin; Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts; Canberra Contemporary Art Space; and Westspace, Edmund Pearce Gallery and Monash Gallery of Art, Melbourne, among many others. In 2012, she was commissioned to create *Unset Typologies*, a public artwork for the City of Melbourne. In 2018, Pluta was shortlisted for the MAMA Foundation National Photographic Award. She is represented by THIS IS NO FANTASY, Melbourne and is a lecturer at UNSW Art & Design, Sydney.

Pluta embraces photography as a way of interpreting and re-conceptualising the role of images in our lives. She describes her processes of finding, fragmenting and reconfiguring as 'gleaning' – as a 'poetic scavenging'. Central to her work is the notion of an expanded photographic materiality which sees her work across murals, re-photographed photographs, collages, video, artists' books, found paraphernalia and discarded objects from the natural world. Conceptually anchored in the effects of globalisation and Pluta's experience as a migrant to Australia, her work articulates a fluid mode of being in the world.

GLASSHOUSE REGIONAL GALLERY

Izabela Pluta: *Reversal*

18 May–21 July 2019

Gallery Curator: Bridget Purtill

Gallery Assistant: Michelle Campano

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Images: Izabela Pluta

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Gallery opening hours

Tue–Fri: 10am–5pm

Sat–Sun: 10am–4pm

Public Holidays: 10am–4pm

cover image *Reversal* (detail) 2019, dye-sublimation print on fabric 550 x 800 cm

inside fold *After the pleasure of ruins* (detail) 2015/2019, 153 unique photo silk screen prints on found book, 18.7 x 25.4 cm

overleaf [left] *Reversal* (detail)


overleaf [right] documentation of book spine of Macaulay, Rose. *Roloff Bery interprets in photographs 'Pleasure of Ruins' by Rose Macaulay*, Thames and Hudson, 1977.

After the pleasure of ruins, printed by Ben Rak, Throwdown Press.

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